



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Public Policy and Global Affairs



Pragmatism amidst Anxiety: Canadian Opinions on China and Canada-China Relations

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Key Findings

PREFACE

At a time of global turbulence and at the mid-way point of a Liberal government facing significant decisions about the direction and pace of developing bilateral relations with China, there are signs of growing public support for deeper economic relations and partnerships coupled with significant anxiety about greater Chinese military activities and its expanding presence inside Canada.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Designed by Professors Paul Evans and Xiaojun Li, with analytic support from Stefano Burzo, the survey is a component of a multi-year project on “Emerging Issues in Canada China Relations.” It was conducted by Qualtrics on a random sample of 1,519 Canadian adults (18+) weighted according to the latest census on age, gender, and region to ensure its representativeness of the entire adult population. In English only, it was in the field from August 30 to September 12, 2017. The margin of error is +/-3%. Median completion time was 15 minutes.

The survey posed 60 substantive questions probing views on trade and investment issues, global leadership, Sino-US comparisons, military and security matters, policy priorities, the state of human rights in China and how best to advance them, protecting Canadian values and institutions at home, information sources, and factors that shape views of China. Also included in the survey were a battery of socio-demographic questions concerning gender, income, country of birth, ethnicity, age, marital status, number of children, place of residence, level of education, household income, party identification and intensity of identification.

In addition the survey contained an experimental module that probed Canadians’ knowledge of the amount of Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) coming into Canada and the regulations governing FDI, and their support for FDI projects from China and other countries.

Tables and figures below include the response of “don’t know”.

The full survey results are available on-line at <http://iar.ubc.ca/publications/iar-publications/>.

SUMMARY

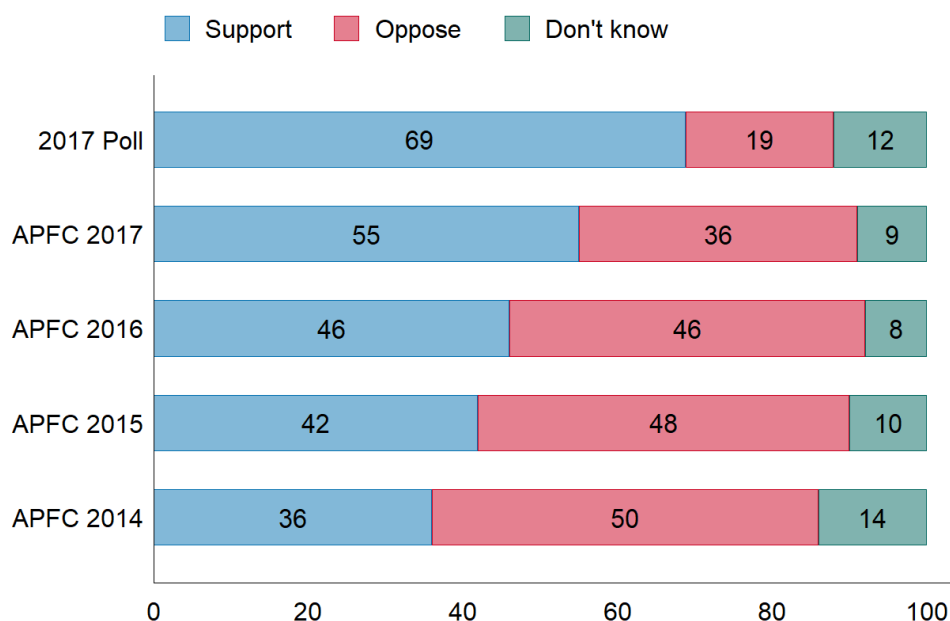
- Support is deepening for expanded economic connections and increased partnerships with China even as views of China remain cool and anxieties are growing about several factors including China’s military modernization and China’s impact on domestic Canadian values and institutions.
- Support for negotiating a Free Trade Agreement is at 69% even as anxieties about Chinese FDI remain considerable.
- Promoting human rights and democracy remains a significant concern but they are not ranked as important as economic issues and partnering with China in addressing global issues where China is seen as an increasingly important and constructive leader in comparison to the United States. The public sees a distinction between political rights and individual freedoms and prefers encouraging rule of law and economic connections (not sanctions) to advance them. This support for human rights through deeper economic engagement does not conform with the traditional binary narrative of trade vs. human rights.
- Attitudes are more nuanced and pragmatic than commonly portrayed. But a fundamental distrust of the Chinese political system and aspects of its behaviour create an under layer of anxiety and volatility.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Policy Preferences

- 69% now strongly or moderately support negotiation of an FTA with China; 19% oppose and 12% are undecided. Support has risen considerably since the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada’s national opinion polls in which the support levels were 45% in 2013, 36% in 2014 and 55% in May 2017.

Support for FTA with China

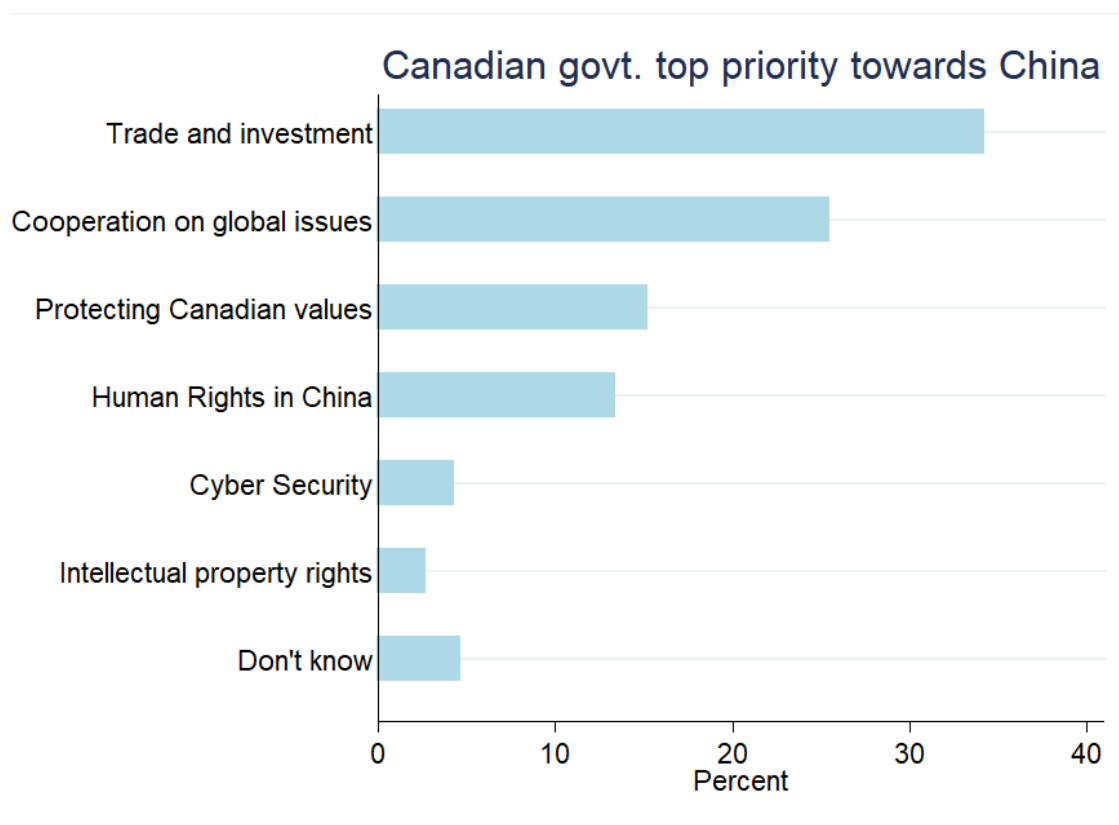


- The support level is highest among Liberals (78%), Conservatives (70%) and lowest among NDP and Green supporters (both at 56%). It is strongest among respondents 58-88 (77%), males (76%), residents of the Atlantic provinces (74%), and those who look at news about China everyday (78%). The level of support is lowest among respondents 35-44 (62%), females (62%), residents of British Columbia (66%) and those who almost never look at news about China (59%).
- The strongest reasons for support are the belief that that an FTA is likely to encourage investment in Canadian businesses (70% agree), is important because of rising protectionist sentiments in the US and Europe (62% agree) and would bring greater economic prosperity to Canada (53% agree). Again, these figures generally higher than the responses in identical questions in the March 2017 poll conducted by the APFC where agreement that respectively were 63%, 62% and 57%.¹ At the same time, and suggesting a growing pragmatism, only 25% felt that an FTA was a bad idea because of the risks of getting too involved with a country governed by a communist party and with different values and culture, lower than the APFC 2017 figure of 31%.
- Contrary to their support for an FTA with China, Canadians are more anxious about FDI from China. Such anxiety, however, stems in large part from widespread

¹ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2017 National Opinion Poll, Canadian Views on Engagement with China, 3 May 2017.
http://www.asiapacific.ca/sites/default/files/filefield/nop_2017_canadian_views_on_engagement_with_china_0.pdf

misperceptions about (1) the amount of China's FDI in Canada and (2) investment rules and practices that govern FDI projects in Canada. Correcting these misperceptions with factual information raises the odds that Canadians would favor FDI projects from China over comparable ones from Japan, the Netherlands, or the United States by 70%.²

- Regarding the federal government's highest priorities in the relationship with China, 34% believe it should be trade and investment; 25% cooperation on global issues like climate change, epidemics and counter-terrorism; 15% protection of Canadian values and institutions at home from growing Chinese influence; 13% advancing human rights and democratic reforms in China; 7% protecting cyber security and intellectual property rights.



² These results are from the experimental module of the survey. More details can be found in the working paper: https://www.academia.edu/34861467/Myths_and_Misperceptions_of_Chinese_Investments_in_Canada_Evidence_from_a_Survey_Experiment.

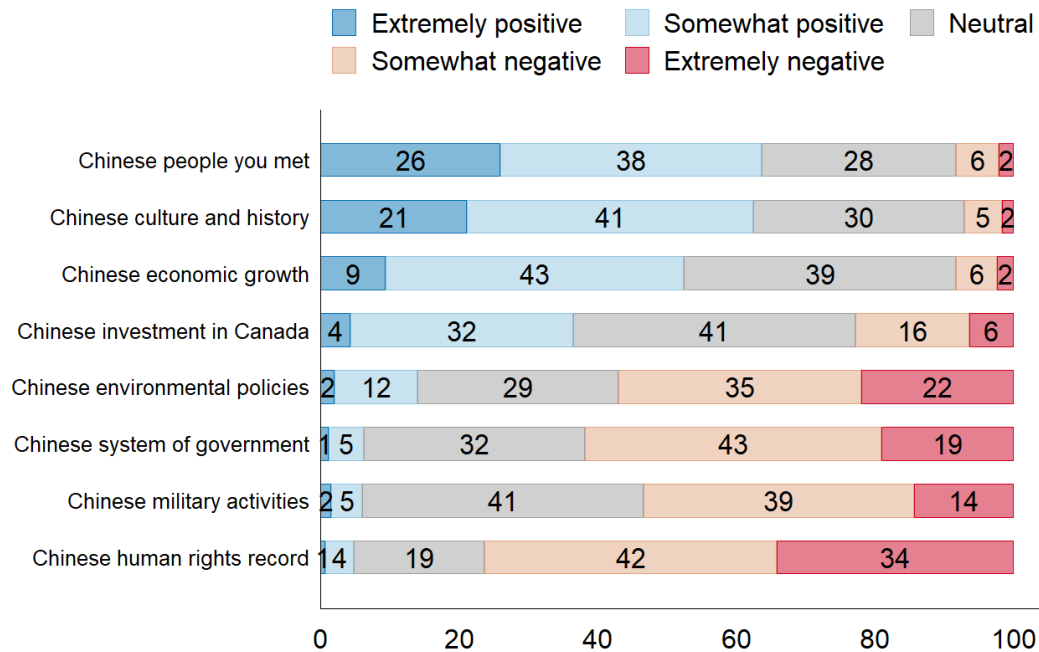
- 36% reported that Chinese investment in Canada had a positive impact on their views of China 23% negative and 41% neither positive nor negative.
- 37% support the negotiation of an extradition treaty with China, 9% oppose it, and the majority (54%) are undecided or don't know.
- Only 8% support allowing Chinese universities to open campuses in Canada, 48% are opposed and 44% feel it depends on the specific focus and location.

2. Importance, Favourability and Concerns

- Looking out over the next decade, China is ranked second only to the United States as of importance to Canada (well ahead of the UK and far ahead of India); 61% believe that China will be the biggest economic power in the world within the next decade as compared to 22% who believe that it will be the US.
- The favourability index for China remains cool with 36% favourable and 57% unfavourable. Important is that similar figures for the US are only somewhat more positive at 50% favourable and 44% unfavourable.
- In responding to what factors influence positively or negatively views of China, the most positive were interactions with Chinese people respondents have met, knowledge of Chinese culture and history, and China's economic dynamism. Most negative are Chinese investment in Canada, its environmental policies and, especially, military activities its system of government, and human rights record.³

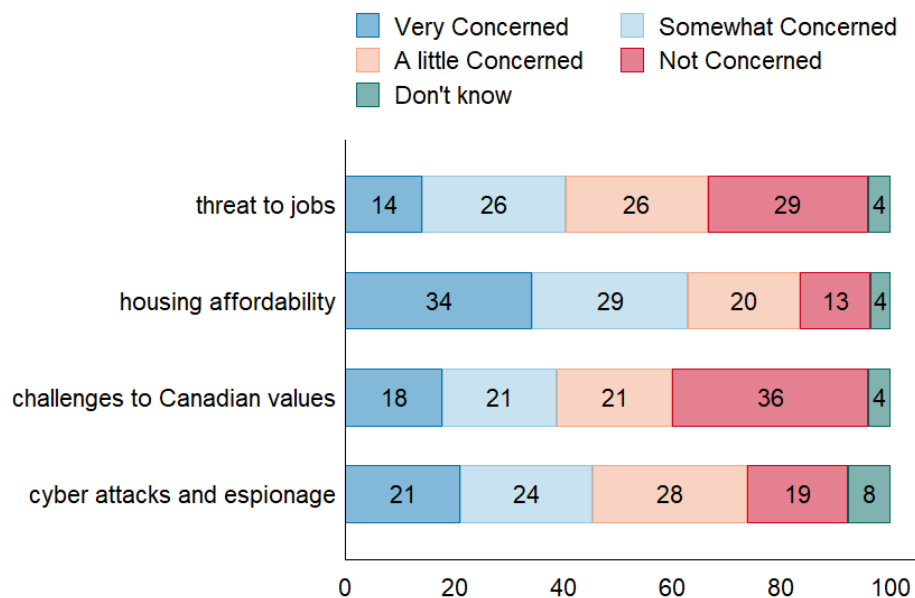
³ These correspond very closely to views in Australia revealed in the 2016 Lowy Institute Poll which found positives of 85% for Chinese people, 79% for culture and history, 75% for economic growth. Negatives were 59% Chinese investments in Australia, 67% for China's environmental policies, 73% for China's system of government, 79% for China's military activities, and 86% for its human rights record. Lowy Institute Poll 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/lowy-institute-poll-2016>

How these factors influence your overall view of China:



- There is a high-level of anxiety about China's growing presence in Canada concentrated on housing availability and affordability, cyber attacks and espionage potential threats to jobs and threats to the Canadian way of life.

With growing Chinese presence in Canada do you worry about:



3. Global Leadership and the US Factor

- On global leadership there is a visible lack of confidence about the role of the United States. 36% see the US as the most responsible leader over the next decade as compared to China at 28%. But more respondents see China as the country more likely to maintain peace, be more stable and predictable, and do more to address climate change and the environment.⁴
- As seen in several other polls the distrust of the Trump administration, concerns about rising US protectionism, the NAFTA renegotiation, specific trade disputes, and numerous calls for diversification are very likely key drivers of this shift towards a pragmatic reassessment of what to do with China and other trading partners.⁵
- In the event of a US-China military conflict, 15% would support the United States while 55% prefer neutrality or a Canadian role in brokering a diplomatic negotiation, and 28% feel it depends on the circumstances.⁶ More than 60% are concerned about Chinese military build-up but only 16% support increasing Canadian defence spending in response.⁷

4. Human Rights

- Advancing human and democratic reform is the fourth highest priority for Canadians behind trade and investments issues, promoting cooperation on global issues (including climate change and anti-terrorism) and protecting Canadian values and institutions at home.

⁴ Similar questions in the April 2017 Abacus poll found that 61% of Canadians felt that China was doing more than the US to try to maintain peace and avoid conflict, 57% that China was a better example of what world leadership looked like, and 54% that it was more stable and predictable than the US. Abacus Data, 27 April 2017, <http://abacusdata.ca/tensions-rising-canadian-views-on-foreign-conflict-china-trudeau-in-an-international-crisis/>. By comparison, the 2017 Lowy Institute Poll in a similar question found that 61% of Australians trusted the United States as compared to 46% who trusted China to act more responsibly in the world.

⁵ See in particular the APFC 2017 NOP. A recent Abacus poll found that more Canadians (26%) had a positive view of the government of China than had a positive view of the United States (19%). Abacus Data, 9 August 2017, <http://abacusdata.ca/us-government-seen-as-no-better-than-chinese-russian-governments/>

⁶ By comparison, an Abacus poll in April 2017 found that if the US were to enter into an armed conflict with China, 10% of Canadians would join the fight with military support, 17% would express support for the US but without military participation, 34% recommend remaining neutral and 39% would oppose the conflict and urge diplomatic solutions. Abacus Data 27 April 2017, <http://abacusdata.ca/tensions-rising-canadian-views-on-foreign-conflict-china-trudeau-in-an-international-crisis/>

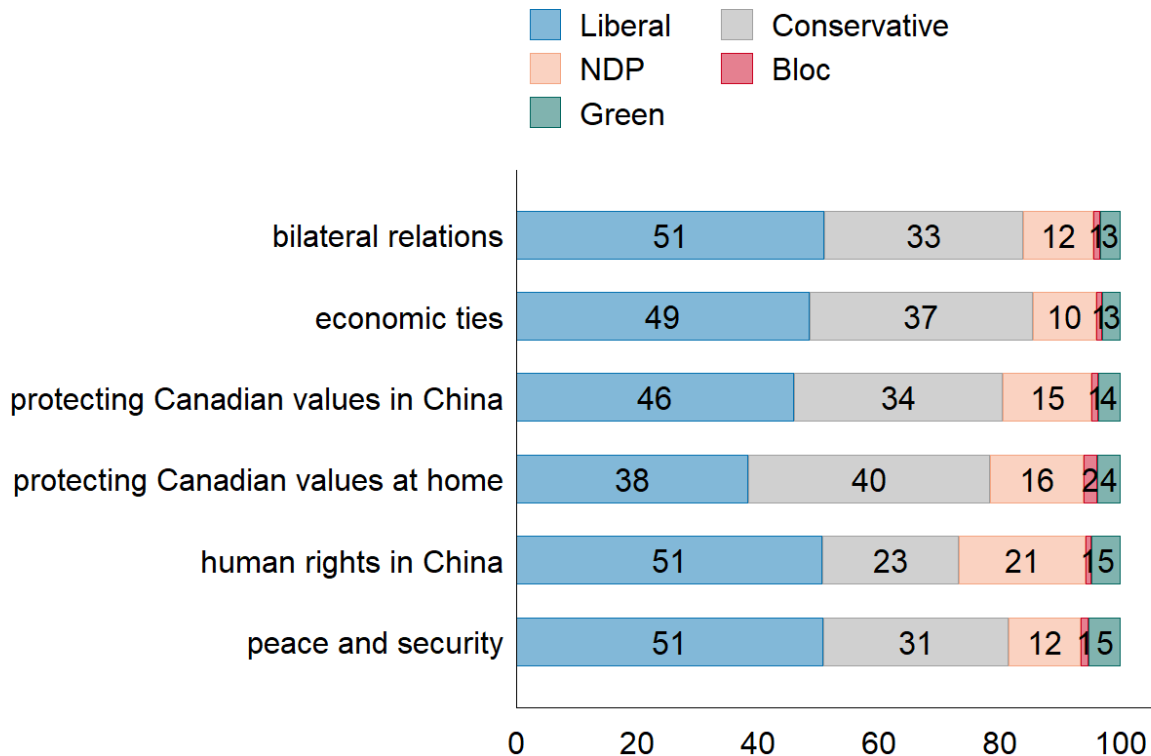
⁷ By comparison, in a 2017 Lowy Institute poll just less than half of Australians feel China is likely to become a military threat in the next 20 years and about a third favour using Australian military forces if China initiated a military conflict with one of its neighbours over disputed islands or territories. Lowy Institute Poll 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2017-lowy-institute-poll>

- 53% believe human rights have not improved in China in the last decade while 64% believe personal freedoms have increased, suggesting a sophistication about developments in China not always reflected in mainstream media accounts. Even as political repression appears to be increasing in China, 69% continue to believe that human rights will improve as the economy opens. More than half believe that a Canadian role in helping strengthen the rule of law and increasing bilateral linkages is the best way to promote human rights in China while only 14% prefer public statements and pressure or economic sanctions.

5. Party Performance

Asked about which party could be expected to do a better job managing relations with China, not surprisingly party affiliation was a strong predictor of responses. While party supporters tended to view their party as best positioned to handle China issues, Liberals scored highest by wide margins on general management of relations, economic ties, protecting Canadians in China, promoting human rights, and maintaining peace. The only area where the Conservative Party was favoured was in protecting Canadian values at home.

Which party would do a better job with China about:



- On the matter of whether the government is doing enough to protect Canadian citizens abroad, a large majority have no opinion or don't know. Of those who offered an opinion, almost three quarters said it is not doing enough.

6. Explaining Variance

- Age appears to have an important influence in several areas. Respondents under 35 are more likely to see cooperation on global issues (including climate change) as a key governmental priority and are far more likely to see China rather than the US as the most important economy in the next decade, the more responsible global leader, the more likely to maintain peace and stability and respectful of people from other countries. Respondents 55 and above stand out for promoting human rights at home as the best way to influence the situation in China and for being especially concerned about the threat to Canadian jobs and ways of life.
- Asked about how often respondents listen, watch or read news about China, 7% reported every day, 15% 3-4 times per week, 48% 1-2 times a week and 30% almost never. Those who read most often (every day or three or four times per week) are more likely to rank China higher than the US higher on global leadership questions, support an FTA, and believe that China should be pressured to improve human rights. They are less likely to believe that human rights will improve as China's economy opens and are more worried about China's rising presence inside Canada.
- The sources of news that are used "sometimes" and "frequently" include TV (56%), online newspapers, magazines and blogs (56%), discussion with other people (49%), print newspapers and magazines (43%), radio (36%) and social media (35%).

For Further Information:

Paul Evans – paul.evans@ubc.ca

Xiaojun Li – xiaojun.li@ubc.ca